



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,  
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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THE  
PARENTS' REVIEW

A Monthly Magazine  
Of Home-Training and Culture.

*Edited by CHARLOTTE M. MASON.*

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THE  
PARENTS' REVIEW

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE  
OF HOME-TRAINING AND CULTURE.

"Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, a life."

HIGHER RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

BY THE REV. S. A. DONALDSON, M.A. (ETON).

THE question of religious education in our upper and middle class schools has lately been attracting considerable attention. The House of Laymen appointed a committee to consider the subject in 1890, and the result has been a most valuable report, presented Feb. 1891, embodying much important matter, and many fruitful suggestions prompted by patient and thorough inquiry. In several dioceses, notably in that of Oxford, Associations have been formed in order to raise the general tone of religious education among children of the upper and middle classes, and the whole matter has seemed so important that a central organisation is now being arranged under the immediate supervision of the Primate, with the object of concentrating the scattered efforts both of these Associations and of individuals. From this we may look for more information, and let us hope satisfactory results in the near future.

There can be no question that this is an important matter, one indeed of national concern, affecting every household with children to rear and educate, and touching closely on one of the primary duties of religious bodies of every denomination. It is no doubt the knowledge of this fact which has led the Editor of this magazine to ask me to throw into article shape the



substance of a paper which I read at the Ruridecanal Conference held at Slough last May,\* and so to bring before the readers of the *Parents' Review* the way in which the subject strikes one who is engaged in the practical work of tuition at one of our great public schools. The resolution to which my paper led up ran in its final form as follows: "That this conference views with regret the general neglect of definite religious instruction among the children of the upper and middle classes both at home and at school, and would gladly welcome the issue under authority of some manual or manuals which might serve as a basis for doctrinal teaching." This resolution was, after some interesting discussion, unanimously adopted, and it may fairly claim to represent the opinion of a considerable number of those acquainted with the state of religious education throughout the country.† The consideration of such a motion naturally divided itself under two heads: (1) the religious education of children of the upper class; (2) of the middle class. Each of these subdivides itself again under the heads of "home" and "school," and still further subdivision may be made by considering boys apart from girls. The subject therefore is sufficiently wide, and no attempt can be made here to do more than introduce it. But it is not too much to say that the present state of things is most unsatisfactory, constituting indeed a blot not only on our churchmanship, but on our common Christianity.

1. To deal, then, with the upper classes first, it may safely be asserted that, as a general rule, boys leave home and go to school with a lamentable want of definite religious knowledge; and by religious knowledge I mean the groundwork laid for a more complete knowledge of doctrine hereafter, and for the application of doctrine to the ordinary duties of daily life. This statement is of course not universally true. The exceptions to it—and let us thank God for that—are most numerous. But the fact remains that a great number of boys reach our schools every year, not only incompetent to put into language any idea

\* It should be remembered that the audience was composed exclusively of members of the Church of England.

† It is interesting to find confirmation of this view in Mr. Gore's lately published Bampton Lectures for 1891 (p. 184). "Perhaps there is no part of the Church which has sinned as the English Church has sinned in the neglect of definite religious teaching. Nor can one who desires her welfare aim at anything better than the recovery and promotion of simple dogmatic teaching, based on the Catechism and appealing to Scripture, not least among the youth of the educated classes."

of what they understand by the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity, for example, or of the Incarnation, or the Atonement, or the meaning of the Sacraments—not only apt to confuse, for instance, the Resurrection and Ascension of our Lord (a mistake constantly recurring), but absolutely unable to find their way about their Bibles, and ignorant of the general outline of facts both in the Old and New Testament.

Now the blame for this lamentable result, of course, rests chiefly with the parent, and the parent of such children belongs generally to one of three classes: *First*, there is the busy parent. The father perhaps is away at his office all day, leaving home at an early hour and not returning till late, by which time he is thoroughly tired out, disinclined to do more than wish a perfunctory good-night to his children, who are perhaps as fractious as himself; the mother possibly has the arrangements of a large household to superintend or duties connected with outside interests to fulfil, and "really hasn't time," nor can she make opportunity to devote much energy to her children's spiritual needs. *Secondly*, there is the fashionable parent. The father is much away, shooting, hunting, fishing, or cannot be disturbed in the inner sanctuary of his club, or hasn't a moment to spare from the thousand and one duties which etiquette or society imposes upon him. It may be he is not a very religiously minded man himself, and yet he has a vague kind of desire that his children may grow up with more serious ideas than his own, and at any rate that they may prove moral and good; but he stifles all reproaches of conscience as to his own inaction in the matter of directing their thoughts heavenwards, by the reflection that such work is women's business, and that he must leave this to their mother, or the nurse, or the governess—or, in short, any one else rather than himself. The mother, however, shares her husband's disinclination to open up serious subjects with the little ones, her own mind being so little set that way; she has her dinner parties to arrange, her dances and balls to organise or attend, her guests to invite or to visit; and so religion goes to the wall, and unless by good fortune there be some old faithful retainer who will instruct her young charges out of her own simple faith, deep must be the ignorance and pitiful the condition of the children of such parents. *Thirdly*, there is the sceptical parent. And this class varies greatly in degree; from the parent who is troubled by agnostic articles in magazines, by



anti-Christian novels, by ruthless attacks made by critics, authorised and unauthorised, upon the most cherished beliefs, to the parent who is avowedly sceptical, who prefers that his children should enter life "with a mind unbiassed and free from prejudice"; and to whom anything in the nature of religious instruction is anathema. In either case the result is much the same for the unfortunate children. They leave the shelter of home but ill equipped for what may meet them at its very threshold, deficient too often not merely in the knowledge of biblical facts, but in guiding principles of action.

And here, parenthetically, it may be asked why is it that the habit of catechising, and forming Sunday classes for, the children of wealthier parents is so much more the exception than the rule? One may find parishes in all directions where the most elaborate arrangements are made for the religious education of the poorer classes; but the rich are often at a disadvantage in this respect when compared with the children of humbler folk.

2. When boys reach school, the schoolmaster, with all the goodwill in the world is unable adequately to stand *in loco parentis* in this matter. At all the best private preparatory schools an attempt is made to provide satisfactory religious instruction, and much—very much—is done;\* but nothing can make up for the loss of early home training, and the effects of its absence reach far on into after-life.

The boy, at all events, passes on into the wider stream of a public school, where there is chance of his suffering shipwreck in the shoals of indifference and forgetfulness, or in the rapids of a so-called advanced criticism. At our public schools in England I venture to think we have the claims of morality most admirably enforced, but as a rule there is too little organised instruction in doctrine. I know there are many who hold that it is a mistake to try to teach doctrine to boys: I am not one of those; I believe the want of this definite teaching is productive of great harm, and many a lad passes from school to the university or the great world without, only to fall a prey to the first upholder of scepticism and freethought whom he may meet. And yet he

\* There is a striking though saddening paragraph on p. 10 of the House of Laymen's Report:—"Some masters of public schools have expressed their opinion (an opinion which is corroborated from another source) that boys coming from preparatory schools are better grounded in religious knowledge than those who come straight from home."

might have been able to hold his own had he but been instructed at school in the Truths of our Religion, and been made a little more familiar with the ordinary difficulties which must occur to every one who thinks at all about God's relations to mankind and the universe.

To my mind it is not sufficient that a boy should pass through a regular course of Bible history, though I readily admit that nothing can take the place of a systematic study of the Bible itself. But when a boy is expected to display an accurate knowledge of the contents and divisions of the Tabernacle, of the details of the High Priest's dress, of the dimensions of the Temple, of the exact order of the Kings of Israel or Judah, and so forth, he is apt to regard the Bible as simply a subject for cram, to be disliked and avoided as much as any of his other school-books. By all means let the Bible and Bible History be taught, and taught systematically; only let it be taught sympathetically, lovingly, spiritually. But let an attempt also be made to introduce organised instruction on Doctrine, on the Creeds and their development; let the growth of doctrine and dogma be illustrated by means of the study of Early Church History, and especially the history of our own Church of England, its historic basis, its claims, and its teaching; let the attempt be made to get the Catechism learnt and understood, and the general outline at least of the Thirty-nine Articles grasped, as a matter of course, by boys before they leave our public schools. It is not enough that this should form the basis of our preparation of the lads for confirmation—of course it must do so. But my contention is that school authorities should recognise far more the need of introducing definite organised instruction on these lines into the ordinary school curriculum.

Attempts have been made, as already indicated, especially in the Diocese of Oxford, to press this upon our higher grade schools, and to direct teachers and pupils, by suggesting subjects for examination, and by offering to supply examining boards from the "Diocesan Scheme for the Encouragement of Higher Religious Education." Efforts also for the bettering of doctrinal knowledge at home are evidenced by such excellent plans as that put forth by the Canterbury Church Reading Society. It is abundantly clear, therefore, that the needs of this question are being recognised; but the means provided for coping with the difficulty are at present only tentative and comparatively slight.



One of the chief objects of this paper is to draw attention to these efforts to remedy the existing state of things, and to gain for them encouragement and assistance.

3. A few words only must suffice for the consideration of the girls' side of the question, partly because much of what has been said about the home-training of boys of the upper classes in section I equally applies to them, and partly because it may fairly be said that they are as a rule much better off in the matter of religious instruction than boys. Even in the case of an indifferent, or a fashionable, or sceptical parent, the girls will, as a rule, have some conscientious and excellent governess, who will superintend their development in religious knowledge, so far as her own capabilities allow; while at school I fancy much more time is given to definite religious education among girls than seems to be possible in the case of boys. At all events, whether this be so or not—and I cannot pretend to speak from certain knowledge—I have no doubt that both governesses and managers of girls' schools would gain by affiliating themselves to some such Diocesan schemes as those already mentioned.

4. I now turn to the consideration of this question with reference to the children of so-called middle-class parents. And here I am obliged to speak almost entirely at second hand. But so far as I have been able to judge from inquiries made in several directions, there seems to be a fairly general consensus of opinion that the children of our farmers and shopkeepers grow up with little or no instruction in doctrinal truths. An attempt to remedy this want was made by the late Canon Woodard, but of course his efforts, successful as they are, could only touch a limited area. I believe that in many of the better grammar schools throughout the country, the religious instruction may be called almost satisfactory; but the difficulty lies with the private and proprietary schools, to which the bulk of our middle-class children go. Here to keep up the numbers of the school is a prime necessity, and to that object everything else must be sacrificed. The masters or proprietors cannot resist the pressure of local public opinion—ignorant it may be, based on narrow lines, grossly utilitarian, but loudly expressed. Hence, where children from every denomination are collected together, it is found to be by far the easiest plan to drop all attempt at the teaching of doctrine, which too often means the elimination of all religious

instruction; and the result, as parish clergy in large towns complain again and again, is that children present themselves as candidates for confirmation in a state of blank ignorance concerning the most fundamental truths.

I may here quote some valuable remarks made to me by an examiner of wide experience in the Oxford Locals, &c.: "The examination in divinity . . . disclosed a very poor and meagre condition of divinity knowledge in the middle-class schools." "It is quite clear that religious teaching is falling into the background in our middle-class schools—(1) as not entering into the competitive examinations which are the avenues to mercantile or professional incomes; and (2) because teachers really interested in the subject are becoming more and more rare." And again: "There is confessedly a difficulty in introducing definite Church teaching in middle-class schools owing to the Nonconformist pressure; and yet Church children have a right to such teaching, which is essential to intelligent churchmanship and to the religious life as we understand it."

Here again it is difficult to suggest an immediately efficacious remedy. But the adoption of such Diocesan schemes as that already mentioned may be pressed; and we may urge all right-thinking people, and especially members of the Church of England, to bestir themselves in their respective neighbourhoods, so that by the weight of public opinion those schools which are lax in practice may be forced to devote more time and attention to religious education, and to disregard the unworthy though specious objection that "the subject does not pay." There can be no doubt that the earnestly religious teacher must impress himself upon the characters of his pupils in the long run, and it must be false to say that such permanent uplifting of those with whom he comes in contact in the end "does not pay."

But after all we must return here again to the point with which we started: that the only real and permanent solution of the difficulty is to introduce a more satisfactory influence in the home life. For middle-class, no less than for upper-class children, nothing can take the place of loving, faithful, earnest teaching at the mother's knee; and to bring this about there must be true religion in the mother's heart. How are we to bring this home to careless unchristian mothers? The attempt is honestly and vigorously made by the "Parents' National



Educational Union," from which no doubt too great results must not be expected, but it seems obviously a move in the right direction, and we must all wish it heartily every success.\*

5. For, after all, what is most wanted is the directing, educating, raising of public opinion in this matter; and with that object we must have not only such organisations as that just mentioned, but also loyal and persistent individual effort. Indeed, it is only through the energy of individuals that even societies can make themselves felt; and here is a field for work of almost national importance which should rouse the enthusiasm of every Christian citizen. Especially does the call to raise the tone of our religious education in the upper and middle classes come with force to members of the Church of England, that body which has already done so much for the education of the lower classes of the country, and which may do so very much more. I verily believe that the removal of the difficulty so repeatedly stated lies ultimately in the hands of the Parochial Clergy; for if in addition to their other—already overgrown—responsibilities they could succeed throughout the country in carrying into effect the second of the resolutions on this subject passed by the House of Laymen for the Province of Canterbury in February 1891,† there would be much more real home religious training

\* Reference may especially be made here to the valuable paper read by Mr. Wickham, the Master of Wellington College, in October 1890, at the Sonning Ruridecanal Conference on "Home Training and Teaching in Religion," full of thoughtful suggestions, and published in the *Parents' Review* for November 1890.

† It may be worth while to append the resolutions on this question passed by the House of Laymen last February. (The whole Report can be obtained from the National Society's Depository, Broad Sanctuary, Westminster, price 3d.)

1. "That the Church should, by all means in her power, earnestly urge upon all parents the duty of laying a good foundation of religious knowledge, by systematic reading and study, at home with their children, of the Holy Scriptures, and of the Creeds, Catechism, and the Prayer Book generally.

2. "That the attention of the Parochial Clergy should be directed to the urgent need of increased care being given towards the upper and middle classes in the following respects:—

"(a) Visiting and pressing upon them the sacred duty of instructing their children in religious knowledge.

"(b) Public catechising, and Sunday schools for children.

"(c) Classes for teaching Church history and doctrine for young men and women.

"(d) Societies for Church reading and other similar objects for parents.

3. "That the attention of headmasters of public schools, and others, should be directed to the desirableness of giving a more thorough course of instruction in Church doctrine and history, especially after confirmation.

for our children; public opinion on the question would be indefinitely raised throughout England, this improvement would react upon the schools and universities; and the difficult problem of higher religious education would be set in a fair way towards solution.

4. "That prominence should be given to religious knowledge in examinations for entrance into public schools.

5. "That inasmuch as religious education comprehends spiritual training as well as religious knowledge, this House desires to express its sense of the great importance of family worship."

Yet another extract may be made from the Report (p. 14) in justification of the latter part of the resolution adopted at the Slough Ruridecanal Conference, inserted mainly in consequence of the vigorous eloquence of Dr. Randall, Bishop-Suffragan of Reading: "The want of a sound and accepted manual of instruction in Church doctrine and similar subjects, such as would be useful to the younger masters in schools, appears to be much felt. One who has had great experience with young men says: 'I used to feel at Oxford constantly how much good I could have done if I had had such a book to give to many a well-meaning but immature young man who was going down to a mastership, as the most obvious means of earning his bread, or an alternative more possible for him conscientiously than ordination.'"